

Chapter V

SUMMARY

This study is designed to gather information about the current status of library and information services for Distance Education learners in Malaysia and also to explore the initiatives taken by the Distance Education institutions in using information technology (IT) to provide library support to external-campus programs. Up to 1997, there has been no study on Distance Education Library and Information Services in Malaysia. Therefore, this research is the first attempt at a detailed survey of the Malaysian Distance Education Library and Information Services situation in the country as a whole. In order to accomplish these purposes, an extensive search and review of the literature through June 1997 for references pertaining to library and information services on Distance Education had been conducted. Nine government-supported universities and colleges (the list was provided by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia on Distance Education); four newly established private universities; and all private higher educational institutions and training institutions in the Klang Valley were identified for purpose of the survey. A questionnaire was designed and mailed to the institutions identified. A questionnaire survey was deemed to be the most effective mode for conducting the study. From the 19 responses received, the data was compiled and analysed.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Analysis of the existing conditions of library and information services in the Malaysian Distance Education institutions reveals some significant findings. The major findings are summarised under the headings as follows:

Responses Characteristics

1. The largest number of responses came from government-supported universities and colleges comprising 62% of the respondents. On the other hand, the private higher educational institutions and training institutions in the Klang Valley record a low response rate of only 34%.
2. Most of the Distance Education institutions (71%) provide Distance Education Library and Information Services for their students and faculty.
3. All the respondent institutions established their Distance Education programs in the 1990s.
4. The majority of respondent institutions (90%) reported having a student population of less than 5,000 enrolled in their Distance Education program since their inception. Of these, half of them in fact have less than 1,000 students.

Philosophical Consideration

5. A majority of the Distance Education institutions viewed as necessary and important to provide library and information services to distance learners.

Guidelines and Standards

6. The findings indicate that more than half of the institutions do not adopt any guidelines and standards on library and information services for their distance learners. However, a majority of the institutions (72%) state that it is necessary to establish standards and guidelines for Distance Education Library and Information Services in Malaysia for the libraries of the institutions with affiliated and extension program.

Library Services

7. The book loan, photocopying, and reserve collection are some of the basic library services that are available in most of the Distance Education institutions. However, more advanced information services such as the bibliographic instruction, assistance with non-print media and equipment, computer-based information services comprising the remote access to electronic resources, online catalogue searching, CD-ROM searching and computer-based bibliographic services, are not fully available yet.
8. The most often used means of providing the library and information services was face-to-face counter services, as reported by 86% of the respondents. Mail, fax, electronic mail and telephone are also common means for requesting for the services. On the whole, all the institutions use one or more of the available means of available services to provide the library and information services to the distance learners.

Management Issues

9. A majority of the respondents confirmed that they do not have any written mission statement, goals, objectives and policies which address the library and information services for distance learners.
10. In relation to the information needs assessment for library and information services, more than half of the institutions had undertaken a formal or informal assessment.
11. The collaborative relationship between the librarian and distance educator was barely adequate.
12. A surprise finding is that resource sharing among Distance Education institutions is not operational.
13. All the institutions indicated the need for academic, public and special libraries to work together to support distance learners.

Personnel

14. The staff responsible for the Distance Education Library and Information Services in the Malaysian Distance Education institutions comprises mostly para-professionals who are not specially trained for the job, clerical and part-time support staff. These three categories make up 100% of the total library and information services work force.
15. The majority (86%) of the Distance Education institutions do not arrange special training on Distance Education librarianship for the people who deliver library services to distance learners.

Information Technology

16. More than half of the Distance Education institutions provide remote access to electronic resources for distance learners.
17. There were 2 levels of emphasis which indicated Barely adequate and Adequate, in institutions providing training to distance learners in developing the necessary skills to effectively use the electronic information resources or technology based resources.
18. The efforts made by the institutions to incorporate new developments in information technology to improve library services, are not encouraging.

Financial

19. The majority of the institutions do not plan for a protected fund or yearly budget for the library and information services for distance learners. The finding reveals that most of the institutions are facing financial problems.

Problems

20. Distance Education institutions in Malaysia are confronted with various problems to provide library and information services to distance learners. The major problems are: lack of guidelines and policy, lack of staff and time, lack of funding and library resources.

Opinions

21. All the responding institutions agree that the government should establish a national policy to develop a network of public libraries for distance learners.

22. A large number of the institutions strongly agree to have a Distance Education library to implement electronic library or virtual library services to distance learners.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study conducted, it was found that 71% of the institutions that provide Distance Education programs have library and information services for their students and faculty. Anyway, it only reflects the overall view of the services, and not individual ones which are: guidelines and standards, library services, management issues, personnel, application of IT, and financial issues. Therefore, the library and information services of the Malaysian Distance Education institutions to their distance learners are still deficient and deserve improvement.

Distance Education institutions need to change their mindset regarding the provision of library and information services to their students. This study found that most Distance Education institutions do not incorporate new developments in IT to improve library and information services. Therefore, institutions that provide Distance Education programs need to be innovative in the adoption of IT and computer networking to provide better library and information services to meet the growing needs of distance learners information in this information age.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on of this survey, the following recommendations appear to be pertinent:

1. Guidelines and Standards for Malaysian Distance Education Library and Information Services covering definitions, philosophy, management, personnel, finances, facilities, resources and services are proposed. These guidelines stress the importance of integrated planning to provide effective library and information services to support the Malaysian Distance Education program. The proposed Guidelines are based on ACRL Guidelines and Standards on Extended Campus Library Services and Guidelines for Library Support of Distance Learning in Canada. While the guidelines in this document are similar in structure to both the above guidelines, they reflect issues and recommendations which are more appropriate to the Malaysian context. This is discussed in detail in Appendix C.
2. The survey points to the need to develop some appropriate models of library and information services for use by Distance Education institutions of Malaysia. The model recommended in this study is the librarian-centred model for the development and implementation of a support system for library and information services. This proposed model centres around the role of the librarian who is designated to co-ordinate Distance Education Library and Information Services. It have been outlined and discussed by Alexander L. Slade (1991) in The Fifth Off-Campus Library Services Conference which is discussed further in Appendix D.
3. Integrated Library Planning of National Information System on Distance Education Program. There have been several ideas and proposals for the planning of Distance Education in Malaysia. The Tun Abdul Razak University, the first Malaysian virtual university in terms of Distance Education concept should be entrusted with the task to design, test, produce and distribute instructional materials, guidelines and standards. The existing Distance Education centres in various colleges and universities should be linked to the system to form the Distance Education

network. Each unit in the network is intended to be well-equipped with library facilities to support the programs. At present, not a single library in our country is adequately equipped to fit into any of the description of a modern Distance Education library. The various proposals for library development in different context have to be integrated into the planning of Distance Education for providing the required library infrastructure. But the attitude towards libraries has been heavily influenced by various sociological factors resulting in lack of vision for integrating planning.

Recommendations of National Policy on Library and Information System need to be accepted and implemented so that public libraries which have a key role in fundamental education, functional literacy, continuing and Distance Education, are strengthened to sustain them.

4. Exploring the IT in Distance Education Library and Information Services.

Information Technology (IT) is the group of modern technologies that deal specifically with the processing, communication and storage of information. It is the use of computers and telecommunications to create, manipulate and distribute the information to the end-users. IT can be an effective tool for Distance Education Library and Information Services. IT offers new prospects and it is being developed to meet the growing needs and demands of a distance learner. IT can play key roles in accessing information, delivery of information, and communication. This section intends to briefly describe the use of IT in Distance Education Library and Information Services system to provide, in the context of services to distance learners: access to library catalogues, enquiry services and delivery of library materials to the user.

1. Networking systems

The two broad types of networks that exist in today's library services are:

I) Local Area Networks (LAN): A LAN is a cluster of PC's and other computer peripherals in a relatively small area interconnected for the purpose of communication, file transfer and sharing of peripheral hardware. LANs are the most common network used in libraries because they save space and cost for optimal resource sharing. For example, a library may connect its online public access catalogue (OPAC), one or more electronic serials indexes, a full-text electronic database, a CD-ROM Encyclopaedia, and a printer to the distance learners. A LAN allows distance learners and faculty to access a variety of resources.

II) Wide Area Networks (WAN): A WAN is a communication network that spans large areas by using telecommunications lines provided by a common carrier. A WAN is especially useful for resource sharing within multi-campus institutions and consortia. It offers the same benefits as a LAN only across greater distances (Rodrigues, Helena F., 1996).

The connection of library LANs to WANs is recently becoming more common, particularly in the corporate and government libraries. In the last decade a number of LAN connection devices (bridges, routers, gateway system, etc.) have been developed to enable such internetworking dependable and inexpensive. LAN-to-WAN interconnections can provide the gateways to public telephone networks, bibliographic utilities, and online information services, as well as the Internet. This has the potential to dramatically improve the access to information resources outside the library, as well as making library resources much more accessible by remote users like distance learners.

2. The Internet

The Internet has potential vast information as it plays a significant role in the access and delivery of library services. Today, a situation exists to the extent that access to certain basic library services is no longer necessarily a function of a physical proximity. Through the Internet, distance learners are able to gain access to a wide array of information and reference sources.

Distance learners from remote locations are able to use e-mail to communicate their information needs to librarians. In turn, the librarian from libraries that support Distance Education program will be able to fulfil these requests by using the same means.

Desktop videoconferencing system can be used as a means of delivering distance reference services such as consultation, documentation, training and sharing of CD-ROM databases.

Electronic discussion groups are playing an increasing role within the information culture and they often serve as powerful tools in the retrieval and exchanging of information bringing together persons with similar interests regardless of geographical distance. Electronic discussion groups can be accessed in LISTSERV lists and Usenet.

3. Electronic library

An electronic library is also named "Virtual library", meaning a library without walls. It will be able to provide a communication environment connecting local, national and international networks for users so that they can access different information databases from the outside or other electronic libraries. So, an electronic library will house materials in digitised form and

enable its users to communicate with it through a telephone link. The electronic library which acts as an information organisation will be able to exploit information technology in carrying out its mission. With the growing availability of information in electronic formats rather than in-house collections, it is only crucial for distance learners to go direct to the librarian through this network. Thus it will not be that necessary for the distance learners to patronise the library personally for their information needs. This will be especially helpful to distance learners who are in separated geographically from the campus. In view of this, the virtual library can be defined as the concept of remote access to the contents and services of libraries and other information resources to the distance learners.

An IT-based library can be a solution to the problems of remote access, searching and document delivery to a geographically-dispersed academic and research community, so as to create a “virtual library” to support this distance learners. The Distance Education institutions thus should assume a primary responsibility in technology initiatives.

CONCLUSION FOR RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The recommendations listed above can be achieved only through the strong support from the government and with the availability of funds, adequate staff, and initiative of the Distance Education institution co-ordinator. It is strongly recommended that the Distance Education institutions’ administrators adopt the proposed remedy for the above noted deficiencies using the Draft Standards and

Model for Distance Education library services as guidelines for the improvement of library and information services and resources for the distance learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The results of this survey raise several questions which suggest several areas for further study. It is recommended that further study be carried out as outlined below :

1. This study has established the baseline data on the current library and information services work force in distance education in Malaysia mainly in Klang Valley and has developed guidelines and standards in providing these services in Malaysia. Therefore, a follow-up study should be undertaken after five years to determine whether the Distance Education library services will be able to meet the requirements of the guidelines and standards of the Malaysian Distance Education Library and Information Services.
2. In 1997, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak – the one of the world's few and Malaysia's first virtual university was established. Therefore, before pitching into the work, a study on virtual library in providing library and information services on the net for virtual university of these "virtual communities" in Malaysia is important to build up the macro-horizon in this field to meet the information needs of these communities.
3. Research should be conducted on the use of information technology which will enable the delivery of library and information services to this group of students. It

is a very significant aspect to explore this avenue due to the important role of IT in enhancing the library and information services to the distance learners.

4. The libraries at the Distance Education institutions should regularly initiate and complete self-studies of their operations and services in order to identify weaknesses and strengths which can further strengthen the planning process.